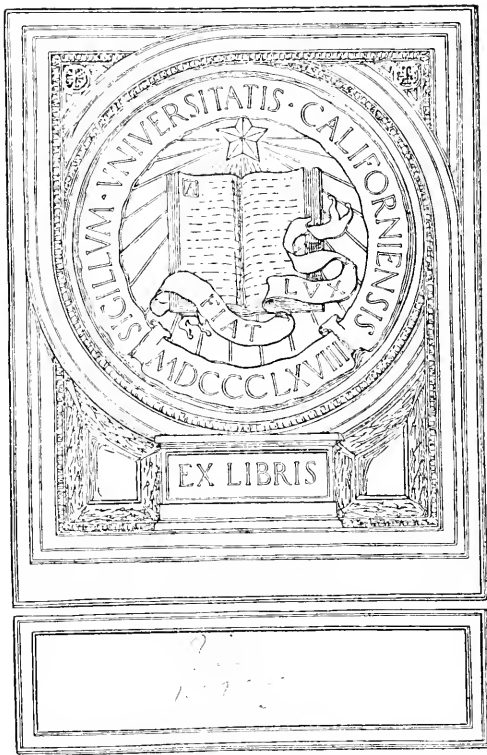


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THE SPRINGS OF ROMANCE IN  
THE LITERATURE OF EUROPE

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GEORGE WYNDHAM  
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# THE SPRINGS OF ROMANCE IN THE LITERATURE OF EUROPE

An Address delivered to the Students  
of the University of Edinburgh  
October 1910

BY THE RIGHT HON.  
GEORGE WYNDHAM, M.P.  
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TO  
WILLIAM PATON KER

MS. A. 9. 1

*“ It is not the contexture of words but the effects of action that gives glory to the times. . . .”*

*“ It is but the clouds gathered about our owne judgement that makes us think all other ages wrapt up in mistes, and the great distance betwixt us, that causes us to imagine men so farre off to bee so little in respect of ourselves. . . .”*

*“ It is not bookes but onely that great booke of the world and the all-over-spreading grace of heaven that makes men truly judicial. . . .”*

S. DANIEL, *Defence of Rhime*, 1603.

# THE SPRINGS OF ROMANCE IN THE LITERATURE OF EUROPE

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

It was not easy to choose a theme for an address to Edinburgh University. Your unbounded belief in Rectorial discretion permits a latitude that is almost embarrassing. For guidance I had nothing but a sense of my own limitations and a prospect of the scene that confronts me. These suggested a search over the vast province of learning for some plot, not wholly unexplored by your Rector, that should also be linked with the fame of your ancient city. The world allows, and Scott's monument attests, that, from Edinburgh, and by his genius, "impulse and area" were added to the great move-

ment of the last century which we call the Romantic Revival. That movement changed the literature, architecture, painting, and furniture of Europe, and reversed the attitude of scholarship towards the Middle Ages; a fact of world-wide importance: incidentally it renewed the bond between Scotland and France; a fact of peculiar interest to the capital of your country. It so happens that, long before I ever dreamed of the honour you have conferred, the phrase—Romantic Revival—made me wonder, what was revived. “What,” I asked myself, “is Romance?” Unable to answer, I turned to another question—“When did Romance first come into the literature of Europe?”—and spent some time in pursuit of so elusive a quarry. My choice of a theme was decided by Edinburgh’s connection with the revival of Romance, and my guesses at its origin. I must speak of Romance.

Some may feel that a definition of Romance

should precede any survey of its inception and character. I respectfully demur. A definition of Romance would be easy if there were general agreement on the meaning of the word. Unfortunately there is not. Most people if asked, "What is Romance?" would answer, as Augustine did of Time, "I know when you do not ask me." When dealing with the dimly apprehended we must discover before we can define. Columbus had no map of America.

One way of discovery would be to select an example of obvious, though undefined, Romance, and then to analyse its contents. But that plan if applied, for instance, to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* will be found to lead away from definition rather than towards it. Analysis of extreme romantic types yields a jumble of mythologies, refracted through several layers of history, all more or less distorted and opaque. There is plenty of fighting and love-

making, a good deal of scenery and weather ; and, apart from human interest, there are troops of animals and some strange inhuman forces masquerading as giants and dragons and warlocks. From such confusion a definition does not readily emerge. A better way of discovery is called, I believe—rather pompously—the historic method. It amounts to this. If you can establish *When* and *Where* a thing happened you may be able to guess *Why* it happened and, even, *What* it was. Let us, then, postpone analysis of Romance, and set out by weighing the question with which the Cardinal of Este greeted Ariosto's presentation of his masterpiece. (1510.) The prelate asked the poet, "quite simply," "where he had been for all that rot." That is what I shall try to discover. If we begin by detecting when, and where, Romance first appeared in Europe we may be able to say why it appeared, and even to hazard a surmise at its nature. But the last is a

fearsome enterprise, trenching on metaphysics, as the way is with all inquiry if you push it any distance. I shall seek in the main for origins, and call my address "The Springs of Romance in the Literature of Europe."

You can look for the advent of Romance either in literature that remains and can be studied ; or else, in the theories of learned men who infer the pre-existence of earlier literature, that has certainly perished, and may never have been written. They cite the songs in which, Tacitus tells us, the Germans extolled the founders of their race ; or the didactic poetry of the Druids, which the Druids were forbidden to write ; or they point in later versions to a barbarous handling of stories treated with relative urbanity in earlier versions, and infer from the discrepancy a common origin for both of a more primitive character than either reveals. These deductions from contemporary references to

songs that are lost, and from antique touches in later documents, are always ingenious and often delightful. But they present two difficulties. In the first place, hypothetical literature affords a foundation too insecure for the erection of theory that must itself partake of conjecture. In the second place, it is by no means certain that barbarous legends are romantic to the races who invent them. I shall return to that view before I conclude. At the outset I must look for the advent of Romance in writings that still form part of the literature of Europe.

#### THE ADVENT OF ROMANCE

Keeping, then, to literature that remains, I advance the disputable proposition that the writings preserved from Greece and Rome are not romantic; briefly, that the classics are not romantic. If time permitted I could, I think, sustain that thesis, with



qualifications, of course, and concessions to any who disputed its truth. I would readily admit that the Greeks were more romantic than the Romans. I would certainly concede Nausicaa in the *Odyssey* and Medea in the *Argonauts*; Dido and Camilla in the *Æneid*. But, excepting Virgil, whose peculiar romantic note caught the ear of the Middle Ages, I should point out that my concessions were mainly in respect of the earliest and latest poems of the Classic world, and that, including even the *Æneid*, all such touches of romance as do faintly transfigure the classics are to be found in stories of wandering through strange lands, and of encounters with alien customs and superstitions. I would give my "heckler" the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius, and cut the argument short by taking refuge in the considered opinion of Professor W. P. Ker. He writes (*The Dark Ages*, p. 41): "Classical literature perished from

a number of contributory ailments, but of these none was more desperate than the want of Romance in the Roman Empire, and especially in the Latin language.”

The Latin world of the fifth century was unromantic, and notably so in northern Gaul, the most Roman, because the least invaded, province of the Western Empire. Latinised Gauls led an ordered existence of unchallenged convention, revolving round garrisons, townhalls, and schools. Their life was military and municipal; their literature, an affair of grammar and rhetoric, written in classical Latin which had diverged from vulgar Latin, so widely as to be unintelligible to all but the learned. From the people's Latin, spoken throughout the country, almost every trace of Celtic words and Celtic beliefs had been eliminated. We possess nothing that can be called Romance in either of these languages. Yet Latin

Gaul was to be the nursery-garden of the first seedling of romantic literature, and that earliest growth was not to flourish until it had been transplanted. When, then, and where, does Romance arrive in European literature? The answer to the first question is not before the second half of the eleventh century, and, to the second, probably in Great Britain. The first piece of obvious Romance in literature that remains is the "Song of Roland," as we have it in the Oxford MS. (Bodleian, Digby, 23). The composition of the poem is attributed to a Norman, and the date of it placed between the Norman conquest of England in 1066 and the Crusaders' conquest of Jerusalem in 1099. The handwriting, as distinguished from the composition, is dated about 1170. Romance arrives six centuries after the overthrow of the Western Empire, and appears where a province had been torn from it long before the Latin Gauls had ceased to

speak or write in languages derived from Rome. We know when and where Romance appeared. To understand why it came, and to surmise at what it was, we must sketch in the events of those six centuries which preceded and—as I shall urge—prepared for the Advent of Romance after 1050 A.D., and for its rapid development a hundred years later.

In the fifth century two things happened which began the preparation of Gaul to be the nursery-garden of Romance. A Celtic people established themselves in the north-west of Gaul, thenceforward to be called Brittany, where their language is still spoken by the Bretons. They came in numbers, and the territory which they occupied ceased to be Latin. We are told that they sang lays to a little harp, called the rote. But none of their songs appear in literature for centuries. Again in the fifth century, a Teutonic nation, the Franks,

invaded the north-east of Gaul, and soon ceased, for the most part, to be German. They were few in number, and their ambition was to be like the Latin aristocracy. Their mother-tongue, after a brief interval, contained more words of Latin than of Teutonic derivation. Their laws were written in learned Latin. Their religion, after 496 A.D., was orthodox Latin Christianity. Clovis, or Chlodoweg—if you like that name better—preferred his title of a “Roman patrician” to the glory of his conquests. We are told that the Francs sang the deeds of their kings in poems, accompanied on harps. It may well be so. But none of these poems have ever appeared in literature. They may, or may not, have been romantic. We have no record of Frankish verse, save one. There are eight Latin lines in the life of a saint composed in the ninth century. They refer to a legendary action of King Clotair in the seventh century.

The author presents them as excerpts translated from a song which, he tells us, was popular at that time. We have nothing else. To reconstruct these non-existent effusions by inference, and even to cite them by name as the panegyric of this or that Frankish king, the song of Clotair, or of Chlodoweg, is, in the words of an eminent French scholar, "a triumph of scientific hypothesis." In the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries France was still Roman and unromantic, but not Teutonic, and with Celts on one flank.

In the eighth century a third event continued the preparation for Romance. The Arabs, after conquering Spain, invaded the south of France and were defeated at the battle of Tours by Charles Martel on the 10th October 732. We know that the Arabs sang songs, for we possess seven odes written by them in "the days of ignorance" before Mahomet. And we know that, in the ninth

century, they brought into southern Europe the viol, or fiddle, conveyed from Persia, upon which Jongleurs were, much later, to accompany the Romances of Europe. But the early influence of the Arabs produced no romance. On the contrary, it produced dry translations of the least romantic works of the Greeks. Even the epoch-making contest at Tours bequeathed no legacy to romantic literature. Charles the Hammer never appears as one of its heroes. It was his grandson, Charlemagne, who became all but the greatest of romantic figures. His legendary exploits overshadowed his achievements, and were sung for centuries in every language of Europe. Yet the first legend, that we still possess, was not written until some two hundred and seventy years after his death. Two other events were needed to complete the preparation. Despite the lays of the Bretons, the songs of the Franks, the odes of the Arabs, accompanied by rotes, harps,

and viols, it is not until after the Normans had established themselves in France at the beginning of the tenth century, and conquered the English in the second half of the eleventh century, that we find the advent of Romance in European literature. The placid province of Latin Gaul was modified by the juxtaposition of Bretons, the absorption of Franks, the expulsion of Arabs, the absorption of Normans, and the conquest of England, before the “Song of Roland” appears.

### THE SONG OF ROLAND

The ironical adage *Post hoc ergo propter hoc* may be discounted at once, for the song reveals the influence of all those five events, and, but for their happening, could not be what it is. It is written in French; because Latinised Gaul, having ceased to be Celtic, never became German, but became France.



Its hero, Roland, is the Count of the Marches of Brittany, and it teems with praise of the Bretons :

“ Icil chevalchent en guise de baruns  
Dreites lur hanstes, fermez lur gunfanuns ” (l. 3054),

“ These ride with the high air of fighting-men,  
Their spears erect, and battle-pennons furled ” ;

because France was in contact with Celtic Brittany. Its action, in defiance of history, consists of conflicts with Saracens ; because such conflicts in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries held the imagination of Europe with a growing horror, that culminated when the Turks took Jerusalem from the Arabs, to profane her shrines and persecute their pious visitors. It is written by a Norman ; because the author discovered, in the legendary feats of Roland, a parallel to the historic conquests of his race. But he found it difficult to harmonise the two. So Normandy, though conquered, in his song is still “ la franche ” —the free (l. 2324). Duke Richard is one of

Charlemagne's twelve peers, and his Normans are picked from all nations for the highest praise :

“ Armes unt beles e bons chevals curanz ;  
 Ja pur murir cil n'ièrent recreant ;  
 Suz ciel, n'ad gent ki durer poissent tant ” (l. 3047).

“ Handsome their weapons and their coursers strong ;  
 Never for death will they admit the wrong ;  
 No other nation can endure so long.”

The reference to England, on the other hand, is in the scornful tone of one who had himself followed William to Hastings and Westminster ; because the song was written after, and not before, the conquest of England. To that opinion, at any rate, the weight of French scholarship inclines, as I hold conclusively. When the death-stricken Roland recites the countries he has won for Charles with his sword Durendal, his slighting reference to England—

“ E Engleterre que il teneit sa cambre ” (l. 2332),  
 “ And England which he kept for his own room,”

finds no counterpart in any allusion to other legendary conquests. The Saracen is detested, but the Englishman is despised, whilst other nations, although defeated, are hailed as honoured vassals who follow the oriflamme to war. Finally, this song, and no other, won a way for Romance in the literature of Europe; because northern French, by becoming the Royal language of England, attained a position which Latin, for lack of general comprehension, could no longer hold. Northern French became the tongue common to many nations, and was adapted, as Latin never had been, to the expression of Romance. Here, I must note a possibility of misconception. It is urged that some features in the song we possess are earlier than the date attributed to it. Again, we know that the Jongleur, Taillefer, sang some other song of Roland as he rode in front of the Norman advance at Hastings, tossing his sword in the air

and catching it by the hilt. But these considerations do not affect my argument. None of the romantic features in the song can be earlier than the Celtic and Saracenic influences; most of them must be later than the Norman influence, and that influence did not carry Romance into literature until after the Conquest.

The view that the "Song of Roland" could not have been written until after the events I have enumerated, or be what it is but for their happening, is confirmed if we glance at the historic fact on which it is based, and compare the song with the account written at the time. For the song reveals the influence of all these events, and the contemporary account shows scarce a trace of any one of them.

On the 15th of August 778, Charlemagne's army had retired from Spain into France over the Pyrenees in safety. But his rear-guard was

ambushed by the Basques in a closely-wooded defile and killed out to the last man. That is the historic fact. Now turn to the contemporary account. Charlemagne's secretary, Eginhard, describes the tragedy (*vita et gesta Caroli cognomento Magni*, etc., cap. ix.) in seventeen and a half lines of prosaic Latin. There is no word of the Saracens. Three of the slaughtered chieftains are named, and of these the third, apparently in order of importance, is Rutlandus, the præfect of the frontier of Brittany (*Rutlandus Britannici limitis præfectus*). That is all that history tells us of Roland. He is not even in command, and sounds no

“blast of that dread horn  
On Fontarabian echoes borne,”

that caught the ear of Walter Scott as he was writing *Marmion*.

We hear no more of him in any written word that remains until his romantic glory is unrolled in

the four thousand and two ringing lines of the *Chanson de Roland*. Thenceforward it reverberates through literature, expanding into the stupendous cycle of Carolingian romances, and their derivatives, down to the day on which Ariosto presented the Cardinal of Este with his poem “of ladies and of knights, of battles and loves, of courtesies and of daring adventures”:

“Le Donne, i Cavalier, l’Arme, gli Amori,  
Le Cortesie, l’audaci Imprese io canto,  
Che furo al tempo che passaro i Mori  
D’Africa il mare, e in Francia nocquer tanto,  
Sequendo l’ire e i giovenil furori  
D’Agramante lor Re che sì diè vanto  
Di Vendicar la morte di Trojano  
Sopra Re Carlo Imperator Romano.”

Incidentally the story of Roland gave proverbs to the people—a Roland for an Oliver—and their name to our peers, of whom we still hear so much, even now, when Roland is almost forgotten.

This comparison between the song and the

account written at the time exhibits—to adopt a Hibernicism—a “dry source” in the brief Latin original; a long silence; and, then, the sudden advent of unmistakable Romance, full of the wonders and legends of many lands. Scenery plays her part in human emotion. The mountains are filled with menace:

“Halt sunt li pui e tenebrus e grant  
Li val parfunt e les ewes curanz” (l. 1830).

“High are the peaks, and shadow-gloom’d, and vast,  
Profound the valleys where the torrents dash.”

We are told the name of each champion’s horse and sword, and their marvellous qualities.

The theory that Romance arrived as a result of the events I have enumerated is still further confirmed, if we proceed from the advent to the huge development of Romance which flooded Europe a hundred years later. For that development follows immediately on a renewal and multiplication of the

same or similar influences. Literature is transfigured into Romance by the twilight of the West, the mirage of the East, and the uncouth strength of the North, in direct proportion to the commingling of West and East and North in the politics of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

I would even dare to suggest that our first version of the "Song of Roland" received some later touches, here and there, during the twelfth century, after those influences had been multiplied, *i.e.* at a time more nearly approaching the date, 1170, attributed to the handwriting of the MS. (Bodleian, Digby, 23). One argument for that view is rather technical. French scholars date the composition of the song before the conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, because it nowhere mentions that event. This, however, involves the difficulty of accounting for the mention of a valley in Cappadocia, called Butentrot, through which the Crusaders did actually march. How comes



it, we may ask, that the first column of the Saracen's legendary army in the song (l. 3220) is said to have been recruited from that place? May not the positive inclusion of Butentrot outweigh the negative omission of Jerusalem? And the more, since the author, who swears he is telling the truth, might conceivably borrow local colour from Butentrot for an imaginary picture of the eighth century, but would scarcely insert the most resounding event of his own age, 321 years before it happened.

Another argument may be put in this way.

The song in the Oxford MS. contains three catalogues of nations, viz.—the conquests recited by Roland before he dies, the divisions in Charlemagne's avenging army, and the judges summoned to try the traitor, Ganelon. The judges include Bretons, Normans, and Poitevins (l. 3702). The fifth, sixth, and seventh divisions of the avenging army (l. 3027) are recruited from Normans, Bretons,

and Poitevins. The conquests (l. 2322) include Brittany, Normandy, Poitou, Maine, Aquitaine, and, you will be surprised to hear, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and England.

“Jo l'en cunquis Escoce, Guales, Irlande  
E Engleterre que il teneit sa cambre.”

Looking to literature, excepting the “Song of Roland,” no other poem about Charlemagne—and there are many—attributes to him any one of these conquests. Looking to history, no king ever led all these nations in war, or accepted homage from their sovereigns, except Henry of Anjou, who became Henry II. of England, and married Eleanor of Poitou and Aquitaine. For further significance, Anjou, his ancestral fief, is added to these conquests in other foreign MSS. and omitted from the Oxford MS. I suggest that the MS. was retouched, in respect of these names, after Henry had, by conquest and marriage, asserted a shadowy over-lordship from the

Pyrenees to the Grampians. The singular ascription of such conquests to Charlemagne, and the army-list of his forces, would have lacked all approach to likelihood except to audiences familiar with the short-lived climax of Henry's political career.

Even if this suggestion be scouted, the catalogues of nations in the "Song of Roland" are relevant to my theme. They illuminate the theory that Romance sprang from a mingling of Western and Eastern influences, at a time when the races of Europe were bracketed together by the conquests and marriages of northern leaders.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANCE

That theory is, once more, confirmed by the great romantic development of the twelfth century; and no illustration of it can, I submit, be more convincing than the facts of Henry's political career.

They constitute a renewal and multiplication of the influences which preceded the advent of Romance, and were immediately followed by a development of Romance that, from 1150 onwards, flooded the whole area of mediæval literature. If we take the most important of these renewals, and then the most renowned Romances of the Middle Ages, we can, I believe, establish a direct connection between the two.

The Eastern, Saracenic, influence was renewed by Henry's marriage with Eleanor—Alienor or Ænor—a most remarkable woman, to whose memory scant justice is done if we associate it exclusively with Fair Rosamund and Woodstock. Omitting—with regret—most of the sensational adventures in her long life of eighty-two years, we must, for our purpose, recall that she was the granddaughter of William of Poitou, who fought in the First Crusade, and was himself the earliest Troubadour, or poet of

southern France. He wrote, "I will make a new song":

"Farai chansonetta nova,"

and so he did. That song is more closely related to modern poetry than any masterpiece in the classics (W. P. Ker, *Dark Ages*). Its reiterated rhymes thrill down the ages till they wake an echo from the lyre of Robert Burns. Eleanor, the wife of two kings, the mother of two kings and of two daughters, married to great vassals whose songs are still remembered, is responsible for a good deal of romance. Thanks to her, St. George became, in the words of Caxton, "patrone of" the "royame of Englonde and the crye of men of warre." For that was the battle-cry of her grandfather before the walls of Jerusalem. It descended to her, together with his love of poetry and his love of crusading. She accompanied her first husband, the king of France, to the Second Crusade, in 1147; was divorced in

1152, and, within two months, married Henry of Anjou, the king to be of England, bringing with her "St. George for England" and the dower of Poitou and Aquitaine. But these were not all that she bestowed. The Troubadours of southern France, after attending her to the East, followed in her train; reinforced by Trouvères, the poets of northern France. She brought to Great Britain, with signal results in literature, the artists who were to fashion the romantic material of many voyages into the great romances of Europe.

The Western, Celtic, influence was renewed when Henry became suzerain of Brittany. It was multiplied when his motley array of vassals, drawn from one-half of France, and, accompanied by Eleanor's poets, were brought into contact with the legends of Wales. The historic Henry, as Count of Anjou, Maine, Touraine, and Poitou, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, suzerain of Brittany,

king of England and overlord of Wales, had received the homage of the king of Scotland in 1157, and connived ten years later at the departure, through Wales, of the pioneers in the conquest of Ireland. He, like the legendary Charlemagne, was the war-lord of many nations who had crossed swords with Saracens and Celts and listened to Norman translations of their strange songs. No sovereign, we may add, except, perhaps, his consort, Eleanor, was better equipped for turning political adventure to poetical advantage. His earliest tutor, Master Peter of Saintes, was "learned above all his contemporaries in the science of verse." Henry himself "loved reading only less than hunting." His hands, it was said, "were never empty," always holding "a bow or a book." He spoke French and Latin well, and knew something of every tongue from the Bay of Biscay to the Jordan. This great lover of learning and adventure was, for a time, "the virtual

arbiter of Western Europe" (*Dictionary of National Biography*). The lives of Eleanor and Henry were potent factors in the renewal of the influences that preceded the advent of Romance.

Let us now turn to the earliest and most renowned among the poems that mark its development. We shall find that, like the "Song of Roland," most of them derive from a short, unromantic original in Latin; that all were written in northern French, and many of them in England, in the second half of the twelfth century, and that all elaborate themes made vivid by the contact of northern armies with Celts and Saracens.

#### THE ROMANCE OF ALEXANDER

The "dry source" of the Romance of Alexander is a Latin abridgment (eighth century) of an earlier Latin translation (fourth century) from a Greek forgery (second century). It produces no effect



for centuries. Only after the First Crusade had renewed contact with the East, is it translated into a French dialect and transfigured. The "Milites" become "chevaliers," and Alexander a king surrounded by his barons. Of this version little remains. But after the Second Crusade, in which Eleanor took part, and her marriage with Henry, the poets of their continental dominions begin the portentous expansion of the tale and embroider it with oriental marvels. We get the "Fountain of Youth," "Gog and Magog," and the oracular

" . . . *Trees of the Sun and Moon, that speak  
And told King Alexander of his death.*"

—Broome's *Antipodes*, in Lambe's *Specimens*.

"*'Signor,' fait Alixandre, 'je vus voel demander,  
Se des merveilles d'Inde me saves rien conter.'  
Cil li ont respondu : 'Se tu vius escouter  
Ja te dirons merveilles, s'es poras esprover.  
La sus en ces desers pues ii Arbres trover  
Qui c pies ont de haut, et de grossor sunt per.  
Li Solaus et La Lune les ont fait si serer  
Que se vent tous langages et entendre et parler.'*"

(*Chanson d' Alixandre*, ed. 1861, Dinan, p. 357 ;  
Yule's *Marco Polo*, i. 122.)

In a thirteenth-century version, we witness the first appearance of “The Nine Worthies”—Joshua, David, and Maccabæus, for the Jews; Hector, Alexander, and Cæsar, for the Heathen; Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bologne, for the Christians. They made their last bow to the public, so far as I know, in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Meanwhile they bulk largely in literature, and were painted by Perugino. A hundred years before the antics of Holophernes, Caxton, in the beautiful Preface to his *Life of Godefrey of Boloynes*, beseeched Almighty God that Edward the Fourth of England might deserve the tenth place by launching yet another Crusade, but in vain, for it never set sail. To these fabulous expansions the French Alexandrine owes its name, and, until Plutarch was translated at the Renaissance, they moulded the popular conception of Alexander the Great.

## THE ROMANCE OF TROY

The “dry source” of the Romance of Troy is once more a prosaic Latin abridgment of Greek forgeries, impudently fathered on a suppositious defender of Troy, Dares Phrygian, and a non-existent besieger, Dictys Cretensis. It produces no effect till, in 1160, one of Eleanor’s poets, Benedict of Sainte More, dedicates to her his expansion, which reaches the respectable length of over thirty thousand lines. He asserts the unimpeachable testimony of Dares and Dictys at Homer’s expense :—

*“Ce que dist Daires et Ditis  
I avons si retrait et mis.”*

And away goes the development of Romance, till the love of Troilus and Briseïda, which Benedict invented, after figuring in Boccaccio, supplies the theme of Chaucer’s great romantic poem, and of

Shakespeare's play. In the course of the transition Homer's Briseis becomes Shakespeare's Cressida.

*"The skilful painting made for Priam's Troy,"*

which Shakespeare weaves into Lucrece (ll. 1366-1559), and the speech required by Hamlet from the players, and Lorenzo's ecstasy (*Merchant of Venice*, v. 1),

*"The moon shines bright:—In such a night as this,  
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,  
And they did make no noise,—in such a night  
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,  
And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,  
Where Cressid lay that night,"—*

are derived from Benedict's expansion no less than from Virgil, and not from Homer. The Romance of Troy left a deep impression in European literature, largely because of what a French scholar has called "the monomania for Trojan descent." Shortly after its appearance, no one in France or Great Britain, with pretensions to birth, cared to trace his pedigree from any ancestor less remote than

Æneas. So, in close succession to the Romance of Troy, we get a romantic Æneid (*Roman d'Enée*), attributed by Gaston Paris to the same author, and by others to Marie de France, a poetess, who also wrote in England under the auspices of Henry and Eleanor. In it the lordship of the world is promised to the heirs of Rome and descendants of Æneas, who are none other than the nations over whom Henry held sway—

<i>“ Rome fut grant et bien enclose</i>	
<i>A merveille fu puis grant cose</i>	
<i>Trestot le munt ot en baillie</i>	world
<i>Li oir en orent signorie</i>	heirs
<i>Qui d'Enéas descentu sunt</i>	
<i>Signor furent par tot le munt.”</i>	

### THE ROMANCE OF THEBES

About the same time, and, as some hold, again from the prolific pen of Benedict, we get the Romance of Thebes. The “dry source” is a Latin abridgment of Statius. In the expansion

we read—of the daughters of Adrastus—that their laughter and kisses outweighed the worth of London and Poitiers, the capitals of the realms of Henry and Eleanor.

*“Mieuz vaut lor ris et lor baisiers  
Que ne fait Londres ne Peitiers.”*

The Castle of Montflor is besieged by a thousand knights, and Saracen Almoravides (Almoraives) from the Crusades take part in an ambush of Hippomedon. The Romance of Thebes furnished titles to romantic versions of Byzantine stories which the Crusaders brought back from the East. Parthenopeus, one of the seven against Thebes, becomes Partonopex of Blois in a fairy tale of singular beauty, that recalls the story of Cupid and Psyche, but with the parts reversed, for it is the knight who is forbidden to look at the lady.

I am no more concerned, than I am qualified, to obtrude an opinion when scholars dispute the

attribution of the “Thebes” to the author of the “Troy,” or when they differ on points of priority, interesting in themselves, but immaterial to this argument. It suffices that, but for the Crusades, the three romances—of Alexander, of Troy, and of Thebes—would not have been written to compete in popular favour with the romances of Charlemagne. They are what they are, because of events among which the most typical, and probably the most important, is that Eleanor played the part—it may be in more senses than one—of a Damsel Errant in the East. They produced the development of Romance because others, but Eleanor above all, attracted Troubadours, the masters of rhyme, and Trouvères, the masters of narrative, to display these oriental wares in French, the Royal language of England, and common tongue of every Court in Western Europe. Amid a maze of dates we can put our finger on

the year 1147, in which Eleanor set out for Palestine, and say, with confidence, that here is a renewal of Eastern influence : and, I would add, thanks to Troubadours, the triumph of rhyme ; thanks to Trouvères, the art of telling a story.

### THE ARTHURIAN ROMANCES

But if we do put our finger on that year, we shall find that we have also covered the source from which a renewal of Western influence inundated all Europe with the legends of Arthur and his knights ; incidentally submerging the fame of Charlemagne and the twelve peers. In the same year, 1147, Geoffrey of Monmouth dedicated the *Historia Regum Britanniae* to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, the uncle of Henry of Anjou, who directed the first steps of his nephew's dazzling career. It is a short book written in Latin by a Welshman. But it is the "dry source" of



many a river of song. Arthur and Guunhumara, or Guenever, are here introduced for the first time into literature that remains. Let no one suppose, for a moment, that Geoffrey invented the legends which enchanted Europe for so long, and have now renewed their spell through the art of Tennyson and Swinburne and Wagner. He found them: but whether in Wales, or in the “very old book”—*librum vetustissimum*—brought, so he says, out of Brittany by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, is quite beside the mark. What Geoffrey did was to capture the world of letters. His prosaic handling of Celtic mythology in a learned tongue imposed on the clerks of Europe. They received it for history, and were amazed at the close fulfilment of Merlin’s prophecies down to the very year in which Geoffrey began to write (1135). We need not intervene when scholars, inspired by local patriotism, dispute the

racial extraction of this or that matter involved ; nor attempt to decide whether the Christian graal was a Pagan caldron, or even, as some have it, a stone. It is sufficient to discover what happened in literature. For until these legends won their way into literature they could not produce a romantic effect, and may, for all we can tell, have been destitute of any tinge of romance.

Geoffrey's book was forthwith translated into French poems written by Anglo-Normans, and, apart from its contents, gave a general impulse to the production of verse spun from the legends of Brittany and Wales. In 1150 Marie de France, who lived in England, begins to write her fifteen lays. About the same year we get the first story of Tristan and Yseut from Beroul, who wrote it in England. Unless we realise that the author staged his legend in the England of his day, without a care for anachronisms, we shall be surprised to find

the cathedral cities of Ely and Durham in the kingdom of Cornwall :

“ *N’a chevalier en son roiaume  
Ne d’Eli d’antresqu’ en Dureaume* ” (l. 2199).

In 1155 Wace, an Anglo-Norman writing in England, expands Geoffrey’s *History* into a long French poem. He introduces the “ Round Table ” into literature. “ Arthur,” he says (l. 998), “ made the round table, of which Bretons tell many fabulous stories ; the vassals sat down to it all chivalrously and all equal in degree ” :

“ *Fist Artus la Roonde Table  
Dont Breton dient mainte fable :  
Iloc séoient li vassal  
Tot chievalment et tot ingal.* ” *equal.*

In another passage (l. 10, 560) the three Archbishops of London, York, and Carleon dine at the same legendary board ; for to Wace it is a British institution. Whether it hails, as a legend, from Brittany, from Wales, or from Arthur’s Seat by

Edinburgh, it certainly arrives in literature under the auspices of Henry. Wace writes of him, "I find no more benefactors except the king, Henry the Second, who has given me a canonry and many other gifts. May God repay him." Eventually it was exhibited as a piece of furniture in Winchester, where Henry had been crowned in 1154. At Winchester, as at Glastonbury, Henry's magnetic power polarised the legends of his Western dominions, and attracted French artists to sing them from all the realms bracketed together by his political ambition. Wace's poem, for the first time, weaves the story of Tristan into the story of Arthur, and is named, by a similar process, from Brutus, the imaginary descendant of Æneas, the ancestor of all the French and the British nations. This romantic descent was "the kind of thing that everybody could enjoy," and most people did up to the end of the sixteenth century. It inspired

Ronsard's "Franciade." I once found it set out in a nobleman's commonplace book together with other practical hints, such as the right dishes for a banquet and the proper instruments for concerted music. So late as 1605, Verstegan devotes a stout volume to destroying the myth under the imposing title, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities*.

In 1170 we get the second song of Tristan from Thomas, another Anglo-Norman. In the same year Christian of Troyes introduces, for the first time, the love of Lancelot and Guenever. He was not an Anglo-Norman, but the story was supplied to him by Eleanor's eldest daughter. In 1175 Christian introduces Perceval and the Graal from a book lent by the Count of Flanders, who had spent some months (1172) in England. After that, for fifty years Arthur and Guenever and Lancelot, Tristan and Yseut, the Round Table

and the Holy Graal, are translated into every Western tongue, and interlaced with every other story that seemed true. A continuous legend of Western conquerors was woven together, reaching right down from the Argonauts who sought the Golden Fleece, through the defenders of Troy, and the founders of Rome, to the champions who had recovered Jerusalem. Such Romances of chivalry stood side by side with the "new" classics on the shelves of Mary Stuart's library. Then they disappear into dusty cupboards, to be released again after the Romantic Revival.

Just as the advent of Romance sprang from early contacts with Celtic mythology and Saracenic marvels, so did the development expand when those contacts were renewed and multiplied. Both found their first expression in French poems, written for the most part in England, because the conquest of England exalted that tongue into the position held

by Latin through the Dark Ages. But Latin was for the learned alone; whereas French, for many reasons, appealed to the nations of Europe. To the Celts it was the language of those who had defeated their Saxon oppressors; and to all Christian people the language of those who had delivered Jerusalem. It was written by poets who welcomed the legends which the Latins had rejected. Every nation saw its folk-lore embellished by consummate artists, and their eponymous heroes glorified with pedigrees from the warriors who had redressed the fall of Troy by erecting the walls of Rome. In the French romances of the twelfth century Europe “found herself.”

#### TWO OBJECTIONS

Here let me anticipate some of the criticism which I am conscious of provoking. It may be said that I have ignored the Teutonic Romances.

In reply, I would submit that Teutonic Romance branched off when the empire of Charlemagne was divided between his successors, only to return into the main channel of European literature after the Romantic Revival.

The Sagas and the Nibelungenlied, and the early English Beowulf, were not European romances before the last century. Sigfried, originally a Frankish hero, who picked up Burgundian attributes and echoes of conflicts with the Huns, counts for nothing in the Middle Ages by comparison with Roland or Arthur. The dwarf Alberich creeps through a French romance, *Huon of Bordeaux*, to emerge as Oberon in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. But that may have been because of his diminutive size. There was no room for Teutonic gods and giants in a literature already crowded with colossal characters. Yet the influence of the North is not absent from



European romances. On the contrary, since it was the Normans who launched them, the uncouth strength of the North accounts for as much in Romance as the glamour of the West, or the mirage of the East. Perhaps it accounts for more than either, and explains why all three were condemned together as "Gothic" during the classical interregnum between the two Romantic periods.

It may be said that I have exaggerated the importance of Eleanor's marriage with Henry of Anjou. On that issue I "stick to my guns." They married (1152) five years after St. Bernard launched the Second Crusade from Vezelay, at the moment when Geoffrey of Monmouth published the *History of the Kings of Britain*. Their marriage united the influences attracted by those two events from the East and West. It is when they married, and where they married, that most of the Springs of Romance commingle in the litera-

ture of Europe. Nor were the results of that commingling accidental. They were produced by design; and the designers were largely the poets of Henry's and Eleanor's cosmopolitan court. Mythological legends from the West, and miraculous stories from the East, were guided into one channel by the science of Troubadours—the gay science of courteous love—and by the sterner skill of northern Trouvères. The design was literary; but it was also political. Henry, an upstart and a stranger to his Normans, Bretons, and Poitevins, Gascons, Saxons, and Welshmen, found it convenient to exploit the imaginary achievements of Arthurian knights. None could be jealous of such shadows, and, the less, since all were assured a common descent from the defenders of Troy, and shown a common foe in the assailants of Jerusalem. Henry took the cross for the Third Crusade (1187) as a desperate expedient to save his work of unification

on the eve of its collapse. His work, akin as it is to the work of contemporary sovereigns, affords the most salient example of a vast attempt at unification prosecuted throughout the politics and literature of Europe; and that effort of comprehension reveals, so I believe, the reason why Romance captured the imagination of Europe in the middle of the twelfth century.

### WHAT IS ROMANCE?

I have done what I could to discover When and Where and Why Romance came into European literature. But what is Romance? Are we any nearer a definition? Here is a power which produced great changes in Europe from 1100 to 1550, and reproduced them from 1800 until now. Through all those centuries there must have been something in the mind of Europe which needed Romance and sustained it. The unromantic in-

terval shrinks to the relative proportions of an episode in our Western civilisation. Clearly, Romance is not a tangle of absurdities to be dismissed as “rot” by the Cardinal of Este, or despised as “Gothic” by the imitators of classic models. “Imitation will after though it break her neck” (S. Daniel, *Defence of Rhime*, 1603). But Romance is a tissue. In the twelfth century, when it took hold of the Middle Ages, Romance displays a deliberate weaving together of many-coloured strands. Celtic glamour, the uncouth strength of the North, and marvels from the fabulous East, are interlaced in one woof which unfolds a continuous story of Europe, from the Argonauts’ quest of the Golden Fleece, by way of the fall of Troy, and the foundation of Rome, to the conquest of Jerusalem by Crusaders. An examination of these strands reveals that the earliest and most alien are largely mythological. They consist of many attempts

made by many races, in different ages and distant countries, to express in symbols their guesses at the origin and destiny, the hopes and fears, of man.

May we, then, infer that Romance is comparative mythology? In a sense that is true. Its elements are largely mythological. But that view will not yield a definition of Romance. If it did, all mythologies would be obviously romantic. But are they? There is nothing romantic in a savage's belief that the Creator of the World is a great hare, or in a Greek legend that men and women sprang from stones thrown behind them by Deucalion and Pyrrha. These explanations are not romantic so long as they satisfy the curiosity of their authors. They only begin to be romantic—either when they cease to offer a tolerable answer to the riddle of the universe; or, in a greater degree, when they confront the mind of another civilisation which has

explained the universe by a wholly different imaginative process. Mythologies begin to be romantic when they become strange by reason of their antiquity or alien character. Breton and Welsh legends were not romantic to the Celts, when they conceived them. Nor were the sagas romantic to the Icelanders. On the contrary, their rugged strength reproduced a rugged reality. Nor is magic romantic in the East ; it is familiar there. These strands in the fabric of romance became romantic when they struck more modern, and wholly alien, modes of thought by their strangeness. Even this impact of the strange in mythology will not wholly account for the nature of romance. If it did, Latin literature would have been romantic. The Romans, no less than the Normans, were confronted by Celts and Teutons and the fabulous East, yet the impact of outlandish legends produced but little romance in Latin literature. Our search for the nature of

Romance must be directed not only to the strange in mythology, but, more closely, to the reaction produced in the minds that were startled by that strangeness. If we find that the attitude towards strange mythologies of periods called Classic differs profoundly from the attitude of periods called Romantic, we may discover a clue to the nature of Romance in the contrast so revealed. And that is what we do find. Classic periods repudiated strange mythologies and Romantic periods welcomed them. Both aimed at unity in their order of thought and, so far as the Romans were concerned, in their order of the world's government. But the Classic world aimed at unity by exclusion, and the Middle Ages at unity by comprehension.

The Greeks stood for understanding the universe by reducing it to the terms of their lofty intelligence, expressed in terms of their all but perfect language. The Romans stood for governing the

world by reducing it to one august state with one Imperial religion. To the Greeks the Barbarian was unintelligible ; to the Romans, ungovernable. So both repelled him, and all his strange imaginations, as tending to disturb the pursuit of lucidity and order. It is not the goal of unity, but the method chosen for reaching that goal, which stamped its exclusive character on the Classic world, and sterilised classic literature to romance, save for some faint touches in the earliest and latest poems that dealt with wandering, and sometimes paused to wonder. Even in their own mythology the Greeks got rid of their Titans at the beginning of the world ; whereas the uncouth North kept its giants at endless war against its gods ; and the Persians retained Ahrimahn in perpetual conflict with Ormuzd ; and the Celts were uncertain whether their Arthur would ever return from the twilight of Avalon.



On the other hand, if we turn to the first Romantic period, we find the most striking characteristic of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in a huge attempt at unity, throughout politics and literature, prosecuted by an all but universal comprehension. In that age political actors strove to weld Europe into one, assisted by literary authors who sought to correlate with that policy every known record of the Drama of Mankind. Nothing came amiss to them. The political actors repudiated no race, however foreign, and the literary authors, no legend however ancient or far-fetched. Rather did they embrace the strange, seeming to recognise in it something lacking from their own conventions, but akin to a common humanity. They aimed at unity by comprehension, and that method, at least in the domain of literature, was resumed after the Romantic Revival. Walter Scott and Victor Hugo, no less than Benedict of Sainte-

More and Christian of Troyes, were eager to welcome the strange from the East, the West, or the North. We may say of each,

“nexuque pio longinqua revinxit.”

I am not concerned to exalt the Romantic, above the Classic method in Literature. Both have their several glories, and peculiar seeds of decay. When Romantic interlacing of many themes degenerates into a love of intricacy for its own sake, Romance becomes trivial, and tedious. It is then replaced by classic admiration for the noblest models. But when that degenerates into a love of imitation for its own sake, the classic method becomes slavish, and tedious in its turn. Then we note a Romantic Revival. I am solely concerned to discover a distinction between periods called Classic, and periods called Romantic, which may yield a clue to the mystery of Romance. Such a distinction is, I believe, disclosed in the diversity of their attitudes

towards the strange and, specially, towards the strange in mythology. It is all but impossible to analyse a reaction of the mind. We cannot put emotions in a crucible. Yet, guided by this profound distinction, we may, perhaps, say that Romance results from welcoming the strange, and specially from welcoming the symbols, perforce fantastic, in which foreign lands and far-away ages have sought to express their "intimations of immortality" and doubtful wonder at "that perpetual revolution which we see to be in all things that never remain the same."

#### ROMANTIC SCENERY

We get a tentative definition, if we say that Romance is not simply the strange, but a result of welcoming the strange, instead of excluding it. Let us test that definition by seeing if it applies to things generally called romantic. Take a hackneyed

illustration—mountain scenery. Since the Revival of Romance, and the novels of Walter Scott, most people agree that mountain scenery is romantic. The definition applies to that view, and goes some way to explain it. Mountain scenery is not romantic, or even strange, to the mountaineer who wrests a hard-won livelihood from its crags and heather. It was strange, but not romantic, to the cultured sybarite of the eighteenth century who describes it in his journal as a “horrid alp.” It is romantic to the “heart city-pent” of the age in which we live, and only because its strangeness is welcome.

#### ALLEGORY

“*Ci est le Romant de la Rose*  
*Ou l'art d'Amors est tote enclose.*”

Reverting to the earlier Romantic period, this definition will, I believe, throw a light on one of its features; the labyrinthine development of Allegory.

Assuming that an author seeks a welcome for something novel and strange, he must express the new matter by images that are obvious to his audience; otherwise it remains unintelligible, and unwelcome. In order to establish the coherence of his novelties with the life to which all are accustomed, he personifies his sentiments in characters with whom all are familiar; and that is allegory. Take a capital example, the *Romance of the Rose*, which shaped and coloured European literature in the thirteenth century, and for long afterwards. The author of the first part (Guillaume de Lorris, 1237) turns the new sentiments of "courteous love" into the usual inhabitants of a mediæval castle, and illustrates the course of love "which never did run smooth" by the ups and downs to which life in a fortress was exposed. For that was the kind of thing which any "fellow could understand." The author of the first part sought a welcome

for a new kind of love, differing, in its delicacy, from the romping of “Floralia” and May Games, sung in rustic ditties; and, in its mysticism, from the stark passion depicted in classic literature. The author of the second part (Jean de Meun, 1277) sought a welcome for a new kind of fun, differing, in its whimsical satire, from the blunt predicaments of Plautus, and the banter of Horace. The new love, and the new fun, were made familiar by allegory to secure a welcome for their strangeness.

#### FABLES

Will a welcome of the strange account for another feature in mediæval Romance: the revival of Fables in which animals have most of the speaking parts? I think it will. If you except the animals of Æsop, the dog of Odysseus, the charger of Alexander, and Lesbia’s sparrow, there

are not many animals in the classics. Man dominates the scene. On the other hand, there is an irruption of animals into the first Period of Romance. To secure a welcome for these intruders the earlier romantics had recourse to Æsop—Ysopet as they call him—who had brought them, long before, from the East, where animals have ever been revered. Marie de France ushers them in under the auspices of an imaginary emperor, called Romulus, and dedicates her Fables to William Longsword, the natural son of Henry II.

*“ Ci cummencerai la première  
Des Fables K’Ysopez escrit.”* .

But the animals soon made themselves at home by the charm of their own half-strangeness to man. We know the names of the horses of nearly all the heroes of Romance. In the thirteenth century, without any aid from heroes, Reynard the Fox, Bruin the Bear, Chanticleer the Cock, “came to

stay," till the classical interregnum. After the revival of romance they returned; so that, now, in the Jungle of Kipling and the Farmyard of Rostand, they occupy the whole of the stage.

### FANTASTIC SYMBOLS

It is the note of Romance to welcome in literature much else beside man: with delight when that is possible, and, when it is not, with courage. In Romance man disputes his place with other living beings and elemental forces without life. He receives the impression of scenery, and guesses at dim "dominations and powers" that baffle his mundane progress and cloud his longing for eternity. All these Romance accepts for their strangeness; and, I would add, for their truth.

When their strangeness is exorbitant, Romance, in order to make their truth intelligible, resorts to allegory and fable, and even to fantastic symbols



that seem ludicrous. We laugh, with Cervantes, at the giants and dragons and warlocks of Romance. It is our human privilege. Man is divided by laughter from all that surrounds him. When we have done laughing, we detect in these symbols an attempt—frantic if you please—to explain realities that are coeval with man; that, indeed, preceded his origin and may outlast his existence. Man's domination, even of this earth, is more partial than would appear from the unromantic presentment of his case. There are forces in nature, by comparison with whose gigantic strength man's efforts are puny. There are enemies to his well-being that, like dragons, are not only dangerous but loathsome. There are subtleties in the universe that, like wizards, bewilder and deride his intelligence. Even to-day, enlightened as we are by popular science, we may recall, without contempt, the wild allegories by which other men, in other

ages, tried to explain the overpowering, and grisly, and inscrutable; we may remember with human-kindness that those who invented the symbols of horror, invented also a vague belief that horror can be conquered by a charm in the hand of the little child.

#### UNIVERSAL AFFINITY

The reaction of the mind, when confronted with the strange, is, in some sort, a recognition of ignored realities. Romance is an act of recognition. When Shakespeare attacks the reality of Time, as if suggesting that, round Time, there is Eternity, in which all things and all men are co-existent and co-eternal, we feel that a rare mind is soaring through a rarer atmosphere to the extreme verge of the comprehensible. When Tennyson makes Ulysses say, "I am a part of all that I have met," we feel that this is a dark saying. Yet there

are moments when it seems true of each one of us. Its truth strikes as a forgotten face strikes by its strange familiarity. At such moments we understand that darker utterance, "The kingdom of God is within you." A sense of universal affinity comes into literature when men are no longer content with the mythologies, or philosophies, of their own time and people. Then they turn, with a kindly curiosity, to other nations and other ages.

*"Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages  
To ferne halwes couthe in sondry londes."*

—Chaucer's *Prologue*.

Romance revives, and, extending her welcome to the strange, discovers in it something which has always been latent in man's mind, although starved by convention. The old northern mythology, with its twilight of the gods, and ceaseless battle against a doom of eternal cold, is not so absurd in the twentieth century as amid the certainties of two

hundred years ago. We are taught to expect that catastrophe by popular science, the mythology of our day. But our day is also the age of the Romantic Revival, and in it we imitate, unconsciously, the attitude adopted towards the strange by our forefathers in the first Romantic epoch. We turn, as they did, to all mankind's imaginings, not for comfort, but for human fellowship, in the great Romance of Man's adventure through the Universe. We take our part in that quest, with a brave astonishment. In Romantic literature we listen to the camp-songs of our comrades, and

*“ Greet the unseen with a cheer.”*







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